

**STATEMENT OF A. DURAND JONES, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 2142, TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO PROVIDE APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE NEW JERSEY COASTAL HERITAGE TRAIL ROUTE AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.**

**July 15, 2004**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 2142, a bill to authorize appropriations for the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route and for other purposes. The Department supports the bill if amended to strike the new grant making authority and if the Secretary prepares the strategic plan in partnership with the State. Funding for the trail for fiscal year 2005 is included within the President's Budget, pending reauthorization of the trail.

S. 2142 has four main objectives. First, it would extend the authority for National Park Service participation in the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route for five years from May 2004 to May 2009. Second, it would increase the appropriations authorized for the trail from \$4 million to \$8 million. Third, it would require a strategic plan to be completed within four years that both describes opportunities to increase participation by national and local private and public interests in the planning, development, and administration of the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route and that outlines organizational options for sustaining the trail. Finally, it authorizes the Secretary to provide grants, subject to the availability of appropriations, to partners managing designated trail designations.

The Department is opposed to the grant making authority provision contained in S. 2142. We cannot support this new Federal funding commitment at a time when we are trying to focus our available resources on taking care of existing National Park Service responsibilities. In addition, projects within the region may qualify for current competitive grant programs such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund; Save America's Treasures; Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program; and the newly proposed Preserve America initiative.

The strategic plan authorized in S. 2142 could be an important tool to help the trail develop a long-term management strategy that includes creating a self-sustaining funding mechanism that does not depend indefinitely on operational funding from the National Park Service. We would recommend that the bill be amended to require this strategic plan to be done in partnership with the State.

Reauthorization of the trail would enable the National Park Service to complete implementation of the trail plan, as supported by the public and our partners in the Implementation Guide, a blueprint for overall trail development. Without additional time and funding, the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route will be left incomplete. Commitments to trail partners would go unfulfilled, and many additional natural and cultural resources would not receive the partnership assistance leveraged by the trail that supports public awareness and stewardship through this program. Implementation of the plan is also critical in building a base of sustainable partners and developing a strategy for the long-term management of the trail.

The Act of October 20, 1988, as amended in 1994 and 1999, authorized the Secretary to designate a vehicular tour route in coastal New Jersey and to prepare an inventory of sites along the route. An interpretive program was also mandated to provide for public appreciation, education, understanding and enjoyment of important fish and wildlife habitats, geologic and geographical landforms, cultural resources, and migration routes in coastal New Jersey. The Secretary was authorized to provide technical assistance, prepare and distribute information, and erect signs along the route. The trail links national wildlife refuges, national parklands, National Historic Landmarks, and National Register sites with important historic communities, state parks, natural areas, and other resources to tell the story of New Jersey's role in shaping U.S. history and in providing internationally important habitats for bird and other migrations.

The trail, an affiliated area of the National Park System, is a partnership among the National Park Service; the State of New Jersey through its Department of Environmental Protection, Commerce and Economic Growth Commission, and Pinelands Commission; and many local government and private non-profit partners. Through interpretation of five themes (Maritime History, Coastal Habitats, Wildlife Migration, Relaxation & Inspiration, and Historic Settlements), the trail brings attention to important natural and cultural resources along coastal New Jersey. The trail demonstrates the potential of new public/private partnerships that allow the National Park Service to meet its core mission of natural and cultural resource preservation along with interpretation and public education in a cost-efficient manner through technical assistance while reducing

operational responsibilities. No Federal funds are used for operations, maintenance, or repair of any road or related structure.

The trail has been authorized an appropriation of not more than \$4,000,000 to carry out its purposes during the ten years between 1994 and May 2004. The \$3.9 million in Federal support between 1994 and 2004 included \$1.2 million in development funding and \$2.3 million in National Park Service operational support. The trail has received \$1.9 million in cash grants and \$3.6 million in selected in-kind contributions and partnership support, well exceeding the one-to-one matching requirement established by the 1994 amendments. Since the authorization ceiling has almost been met, the Department supports increasing the ceiling by an additional \$4 million.

The New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail Route has special value to the National Park Service. With over 10 years of experience behind it, it serves as a model for successful partnerships among the Federal government, state and local governments, and partner organizations. Instead of traditional Federal ownership, the Trail uses technical assistance through interpretation as the protection strategy for the resources along the 300 miles of New Jersey coastline where people continue to live and work. Land ownership and day-to-day operations remain with the partner organizations and agencies. It is an example of an integrated system of local, state, and Federal partnership cooperation with people working on a state-wide level to promote preservation and stewardship of resources as well as economic development strategies. It is an excellent example of the

“seamless network of parks” strategy encouraged by the Department. The costs are very modest when compared to the management expense of national park units.

For example, the Delsea Region Welcome Center for the trail is located at Fort Mott State Park. The State contributed workspace, rehabilitated the building, assisted with exhibit development, and has operated and staffed the facility since it opened in 1993. The National Park Service assisted by developing exhibits for both the park and for the trail, and by preparing an audio-visual orientation program. Attendance at Fort Mott has nearly quadrupled since becoming a trail destination and Welcome Center.

The trail produces brochures and a web page that provide national visibility to destinations and resources that might otherwise be overlooked. Over sixty destinations are linked under the five interpretive themes. All trail destinations provide their own management, staffing, and public programs. The trail supports ecotourism and heritage tourism initiatives in New Jersey where tourism is the second largest employer, creating over 400,000 jobs in 2003 and bringing in \$26 billion in tourism-related expenditures. Last year over 50 million visits were made to the New Jersey shore regions—a huge audience for the awareness, preservation, and stewardship message of the trail. Millions of visitors go to the New Jersey Shore to enjoy the beaches in the summer. The trail not only provides rainy day alternatives for tourists, but it also extends the summer season and provides additional year-round opportunities for both residents and visitors who visit the Jersey Shore on an annual basis.

The trail has also supported cutting edge environmental and migratory habitat research through two National Park Foundation grant projects in partnership with New Jersey Audubon using Doppler radar and acoustic sound recordings to track nighttime songbird migration through New Jersey. This is critical as New Jersey lies along the migratory Atlantic Flyway, and the Delaware Bayshore region of New Jersey is designated as a Ramsar Treaty Wetland of International Importance component of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, and a site in the Nature Conservancy's Last Great Places Program.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to comment. This concludes my prepared remarks, and I will be happy to answer any questions you or other committee members might have.